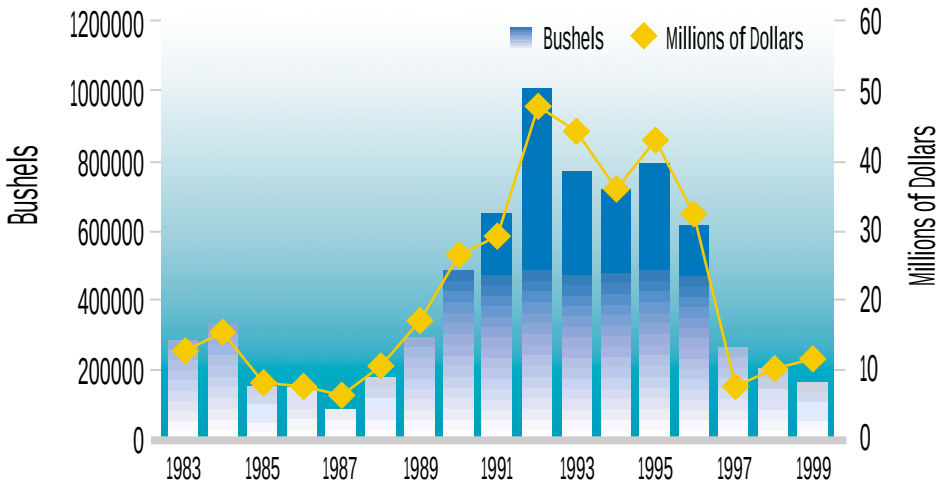
Oyster Harvest

Oyster farming developed into a major industry in the Sound by the late 19th century. Today, after a long period of decline, the Sound's oyster industry is once again one of the largest in the nation. The Sound's oysters are marketed throughout the country, and their high quality commands a premium price. The oyster is, by far, the most economically important shellfish harvested from Long Island Sound. The volume of oyster and other shellfish harvests is indicative, in part, of improved water quality and successful oyster culture practices.

Today, disease is the number one threat to oysters. Since 1997, two parasitic diseases, MSX and Dermo, have decimated the oyster. MSX kills juvenile oysters, while Dermo kills adult oysters before they are big enough to reproduce or be harvested. Nevertheless, oysters continue to endure changing conditions in the Sound. Officials, scientists, and citizens are working together to develop oyster habitats, such as constructed reefs, as well as disease-resistant oysters.

Photo by CT Department of Agriculture

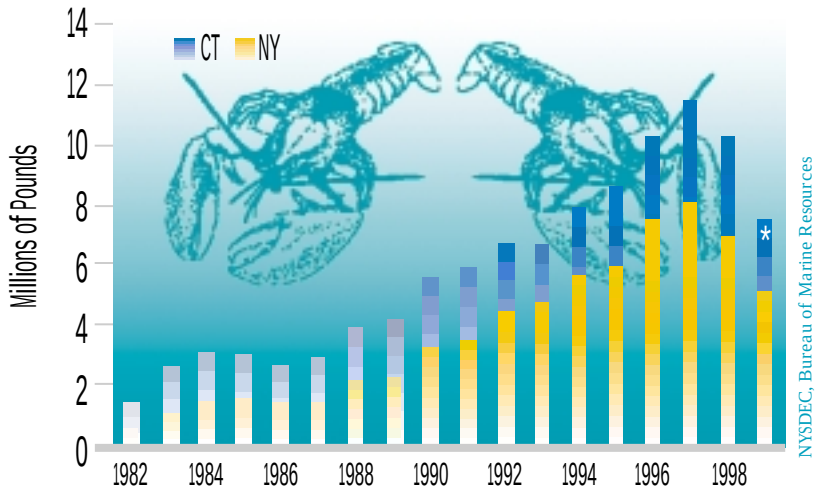
Oyster Harvest and Value



CT Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Aquaculture, and NYSDEC Shellfisheries Division

The oyster harvest peaked in 1992 and has declined since mainly due to disease outbreaks.

Lobster Landings



NYSDEC, Bureau of Marine Resources

* Includes projected lobster catch for New York

Over the past two decades, there had been a tremendous increase in lobster landings, with the peak occurring in 1997. However, over the last two years, a die-off of lobsters, most severely in the western Sound, has reduced the harvest.

Lobster Landings

The American lobster is one of the most important and valuable seafood products harvested in New York and Connecticut. Long Island Sound's lobster fishery was the third largest in the country behind Maine and Massachusetts, earning a dockside value in New York alone of over $29 million in 1998.

However, the health of the Long Island Sound lobster industry is now in question. Lobster fishermen and dealers began reporting dead and dying lobsters in their gear in the western third of Long Island Sound in mid-September of 1999. Continuing through 1999 and 2000, the die-off was unprecedented in scope and catastrophic to the lobster fishery. To make matters worse, over the past few years, the incidence of shell disease, in which bacteria forms a black mass that rots through the shell, had increased in lobsters from eastern Long Island Sound. In response, the federal government, Connecticut, and New York have provided funds for economic assistance and research.

Scientists are unsure what is causing the lobsters to die in the western Sound, but University of Connecticut scientists found that all the dead lobsters had the same protozoan parasite called *Paramoeba*. Part of solving the lobster mystery will be to research whether changes in weather conditions (such as storms or average temperature fluctuations), pollutants in the water or sediments, hypoxia (lack of oxygen), dietary change, or management practices (such as dredging and pesticide applications) could have weakened the animals so that they became susceptible to disease and parasites. Research is underway to determine the long-term effect on the lobster fishery and on the Long Island Sound ecosystem as a whole.